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# **BE-IN: Best Innovative Practices for an Inclusive and Emotional Education to face early school leaving in Europe**



# **BE-IN**

## **International Report on the State of the Art of Inclusive Pedagogical and Methodological Practice.**

*Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary and Italy*

anthropolis



# PARTNERS



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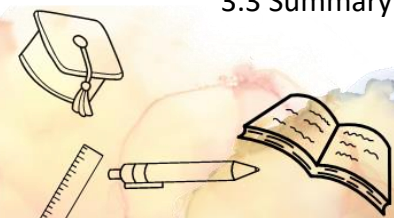


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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Project

The BE-IN project aims to develop innovative inclusive and emotional practices and pedagogical tools for secondary schools that are specifically tailored to students' individual learning processes and abilities. The target group is students aged 11 to 18. These practices and tools will help to overcome cognitive, social, linguistic, and emotional barriers in the learning environment, create a more inclusive space for students in school and prevent early school leaving.

Based on a broad data collection, the needs of students and teachers at European secondary schools have been identified, which can help to prevent early school leaving and create more equal opportunities. On the grounds of the results of this study, a European curriculum and digital training program for teachers and educators will be developed. A European digital platform will bring together all project results and tools and make them available to educators.

## 1.2 Research

The BE-IN activities conducted in Result 1 (R1) and resulting in this report had the following objectives:

- To gain insight on the impact of Covid-19 in the educational system, focusing on early school leaving and the impact on vulnerable students.
- To better understand the international, national, and local policies and strategies to manage early school leaving and promote inclusion and wellbeing at school.
- To learn about the teacher competence frameworks and learning fields to tackle early school leaving and to promote inclusive teaching processes and emotional education at school.
- To identify the training needs of teachers and educators to innovate methods and practices to be effective with vulnerable students from a cognitive and emotional perspective.
- To get a better picture of the formative needs of vulnerable students and students at risk of exclusion for the success and wellbeing at school.
- To learn and share good practices for inclusive and emotional education.

The research aimed to evaluate the state of the art of inclusive and emotional education in daily school life and to gain insights into the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on vulnerable students' inclusion and formative success. Starting from the differences of each country, evidence on the needs of teachers' competencies was collected from the didactic and relationship point of view to improve and innovate the pedagogical approaches, giving value to the effective learning processes and emotional dimension of relationships at school. The research results were edited to map the existing national situations, gaps in skills, and the needs of teachers and students. The research steps followed are outlined below.

- Country desk research on international and national systems, policy, strategies, and best practices of inclusive and emotional education connected to early school leaving.



- Focus groups with teachers, educators, and students to exchange practices, formative needs, tools, and materials.
- Online survey to collect lots of information and feedback from a large pool of teachers and students on the well-being at school, positive and negative aspects of distance learning, and the needs of vulnerable students.
- Interviews with selected stakeholders to gain a deeper insight into socio-emotional education.
- A shadowing activity to observe the implementation of inclusive and emotional education in the daily context.

The research was conducted in all five partner countries (Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary, and Italy). In total, 21 stakeholders, 92 teachers, and 120 students participated in the project's research activities.



## 2 Desk research findings and results

### 2.1 Inclusive education and inclusive school

#### 2.1.1 Policy and guidelines of international and European institutions

Inclusive education is primarily a fundamental human right. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: “Everyone has the right to education. [...] Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (United Nations, 1948).

Inclusive education can be understood as a critical strategy to provide *education for all*. It is a process of strengthening the capacity of the school system to reach out to all learners’ significant milestone in this process was the *UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality*, held in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994. The conference concluded that special needs education could not advance in isolation and should be part of an overall educational strategy. Therefore, significant reform of the ordinary school system would be needed.

*“Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society, and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system” (United Nations, 1994; p. ix.*

During the *World Education Forum meeting* in Dakar in 2000, the *Education For All* concept was extended to include the needs of the poor and the disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people, and adults affected by conflict, HIV and AIDS, hunger and poor health, those with disabilities or special learning needs, emphasized a particular focus on women and girls (United Nations, 2009, p. 8).

The *UNESCO Policy Guidelines on Inclusion and Education* from 2009 presents another vital document regarding inclusive education. These guidelines aimed to help states to introduce or deepen the broadened concept of inclusion in their national education strategies, not only for children but also for adults. The Guidelines identified three key aspects:

- Inclusion and quality are reciprocal.
- Access and quality are linked and are mutually reinforcing.
- Quality and equity are central to ensuring inclusive education.

Further initiatives such as *Education for All* (UNESCO 2015), the Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the *Agenda 2030* - "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations 2015) - as well as the *UN Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UN 2006, in particular, Article 24 - Education), promote the discussion of inclusive education. Problems regarding participation, inclusion, exclusion, and social inequality are being reassessed and further developed (Köpfer, Powell, Zahnd, 2021; p. 13).





**Table 1: International legal frameworks in support of inclusion 1948 – 2007.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Legal framework</b>
<b>2007</b>	<b>United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People</b>
<b>2006</b>	<b>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</b>
<b>2005</b>	<b>Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity in Cultural Expressions</b>
<b>1999</b>	<b>Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour</b>
<b>1990</b>	<b>International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families</b>
<b>1989</b>	<b>Convention on the Rights of the Child</b>
<b>1989</b>	<b>Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries</b>
<b>1979</b>	<b>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</b>
<b>1965</b>	<b>International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination</b>
<b>1960</b>	<b>Convention against Discrimination in Education</b>
<b>1948</b>	<b>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</b>

Table: Own manufacture; Source: United Nations, 2009; p. 9.

On the European level, various documents refer to inclusive education. The right to education for all is also anchored in the European Convention on Human Rights. The Charter from Luxembourg (1996), an output of the Helios-Action Program from 1993-1996, presented three categories: principles, strategies, and proposals for inclusive education, which are still relevant today.

- Principles refer to those statements which must be considered when talking about inclusive education; for example, inclusive education adapts to the needs of the individual, not vice versa. The individual is placed at the centre of each education plan. This is achieved through recognizing the potential and the special educational needs of all.



- Strategies refer to the practical actions to be considered when implementing the general principles; for example, the implementation of a School for all requires flexible education systems to meet the requirements of specific needs in their varying complexity.
- Proposals refer to perspectives and changes for the future; for example, the international cooperation of professionals in the integration field is an essential factor in the move towards inclusive schools (Charter of Luxembourg, 1996).

Adopting the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by all European Member States was ground-breaking. To assist member states with the implementation of the Convention, the *European Disability Strategy (2010-2020)*, followed by the *Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030*, was released. The newest strategy contributes to building the Union of Equality, together with other methods considering inclusion, for example, the *LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, the *EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025*, the *Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, or the *EU Roma Strategic Framework*. In particular, Chapter 5.3, “Inclusive and accessible education of the Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030”, takes a closer look at the education system and proposes, among other measures, to strengthen inclusive education in teacher training (European Commission, 2021).

Another essential document is the *EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027)*, which deals with the inclusion of people with a migration background.

*“Inclusion for all is about ensuring that all policies are accessible to and work for everyone, including migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background. This means adapting and transforming mainstream policies to the needs of a diverse society, taking into account the specific challenges and needs of different groups. Actions to help migrants integrate need not, and should not, be at the expense of measures to benefit other vulnerable or disadvantaged groups or minorities. On the contrary, they contribute to making policies more inclusive overall” (European Commission, 2020; p. 5).*

The Action Plan identifies the educational sector as an essential arena for integration and inclusion for people with migrant backgrounds. The Main Goals of the Action Plan in this area are outlined below.

- To include more migrant children and children with a migrant background to participate in high-quality and inclusive early childhood education and care.
- Teachers are better equipped with the necessary skills and are given the resources and support to manage multicultural and multilingual classrooms for the benefit of both migrant and native children.
- Multi-stakeholder learning communities are created with the involvement of schools, health social services, and parents.
- Qualifications acquired in non-EU countries are recognized faster and more efficiently.



- More migrants participate in comprehensive language training and civic orientation programs, which start upon arrival and accompany them along their integration journeys (European Commission, 2020; p. 9f.).

The *European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education* is an independent organization that supports its 31 member states with evidence-based information and guidance on implementing inclusive education. The agency released several documents, guidelines, research, and reports such as *Inclusive School Leadership: A Tool for Self-Reflection on Policy and Practice*” and *“Early School Leaving and Learners with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs: A Review of the Research Evidence Focusing on Europe*. In the literature review *“The Impact of COVID-19 on Inclusive Education at the European Level,”* the agency looks at the impact the pandemic had on inclusive education with a focus on vulnerable students. Topics like learning loss in general, the digital divide, mental health problems, and the well-being of students were discussed. The review concludes every area, vulnerable students and students with disabilities were far more affected than others. A special effort for well-being and emotional learning should be made to counter these issues.

*“The review identified evidence that significant gaps exist in the effectiveness of the EU’s program for education as support for future democratic societies. There are multiple examples of limited or absent access to education for vulnerable learners. Sometimes judicial action is needed to re-establish children’s right to education. [...] Both evidence and recommendation documents show an ongoing process of redefining traditional categories of vulnerability and well-being. New vulnerable categories tend to emerge in transformed educational conditions. Mental and emotional health becomes a priority for all learners” (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2021; p. 57).*

### 2.1.2 Policy and guidelines of national educational institutions

Legislation toward an inclusive school system and education for all students can be found in the five countries. Although similar objectives and measures are stated within each national context covered in this report, differences are present. The most striking difference is the specific groups addressed by legislation that fall under inclusive measures like special educational needs systems. In Croatia, the legislation considers many vulnerable groups, such as members of marginalized minorities and students affected by poverty and different socio-economic circumstances, and legislative strategies that are designed in many ways to address them in inclusive ways. On the other hand, legislation on inclusive education in Austria and Hungary primarily focuses on students with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities. Although the debate in Austria and Cyprus about social inclusion is also very centred around students with migrant backgrounds and language barriers, the inclusive education measures concentrate on SEN.

In Italy, the educational ministry declaration of 27 December 201,2, in combination with other legislations made it possible to include three categories of students under the umbrella of *Special formative and educational needs (BES)*:



- Students with disabilities (104/92 Law).
- Students with learning and developmental disorders (170/2010 law).
- Students with social, economic, cultural, and linguistic disadvantages. Students with migrant biography that face temporary difficulties are also part of this category.

This declaration aims to protect special formative needs students, BES, by ensuring them the right to access *an individual and personal learning plan* as the law 53/2003 has foreseen. The purpose of the declaration is to support students to continue their educational experience by keeping in mind their competencies and their cognitive and emotional situation (National Report Italy, 2022). What is remarkable in comparison to the other countries is that students with a migrant background and temporary difficulties are included in this particular inclusive concept and, that students are entitled to draft together with their supporting structures (teachers, parents, etc.) their *Personalized Education Plan (PEP)*, now IEP (in Italy PEI Individualised Educational Plan, Internal decree 182/20).

### 2.1.3 Definition of inclusion and Application of inclusive education

While all countries rely on a slightly different definition of *inclusion*, the essence is uniformly reflected. Thus, inclusion and inclusive education consider all people equal, regardless of their abilities or characteristics. The same opportunities and rights must be guaranteed for all people without distinction of gender, ethnicity, language, or ability.

In Cyprus and Austria, the term inclusion or inclusive education is still often used synonymously with the term integration. In both countries, this seems to be systematic since the school systems are still declaring indicators of the concept of integration instead of inclusion.

[...] Austrian school system is still in transition from an integrative approach towards an inclusive approach. When it comes to a definition of inclusion in Austria, we often have to point out the difference between these two concepts.

While integration assumes that a society consists of a relatively homogeneous majority group and a smaller out-group that must be integrated into the existing system, inclusion represents a departure from this two-group theory and views all people as equal individuals who are part of the whole from the outset and regardless of personal characteristics or preconditions (National Report Austria, 2022).

In Austria as well as in Cyprus, students can choose between special need schools or inclusive classes within the mainstream schools – in Cyprus there is also a third option so called “Special Units” located within the mainstream school. For both countries, the criticism of “segregation through curriculum and legislation” could be considered as true, since in Cyprus “Special Units” have little encounter with the mainstream classes and curriculums, while Austria has different curricula for students with special needs. Although the use of a blended curriculum, which includes the special need curricula and the general curricula, is possible for students in inclusive classes.





In Hungary segregation goes even further, since special needs schools are still very prominent and although students are also enabled to choose which type of school they want to attend, the main challenge has been to desegregate mainstream schools to make them more inclusive as they are not specially equipped to handle special needs education or inclusive education. Also, a recent study by Magyar et al. (2020), underscored that teaching special education needs pupils in an inclusive education system in Hungary is very challenging particularly as teachers without SEN training do not possess the skills needed for handling learners with SEN (National Report Hungary, 2022).

In Croatia, the idea of an inclusive school system reaches out further than for example in Austria, by addressing a more diverse range of people, but still faces the obstacles of accessibility, especially when it comes to members of the Roma community or the segregation by socioeconomic status (National Report Croatia, 2022).

The Italian system, with the wide range of groups that are addressed and the very personalized education plan, which is conceptualised by a whole team, including teachers, parents, and other support structures, meets the criteria of inclusive education by far the most.

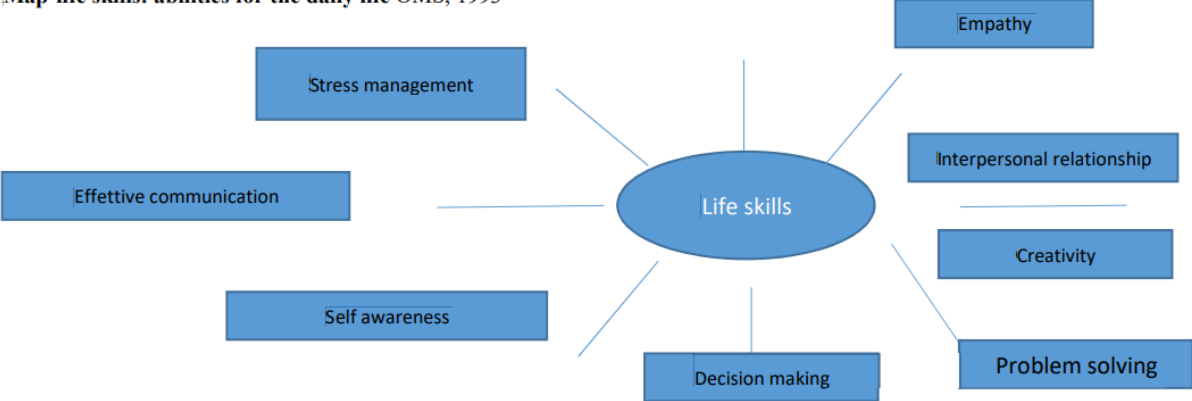
## 2.2 Emotional education and wellbeing at school

### 2.2.1 Policy and guidelines of international and European institutions

As early as 1993, the World Health Organization (WHO) first drew up a list of essential life skills that everyone should develop, including self-awareness, emotion management, stress management, effective communication, effective relationships, empathy, creative thinking, critical thinking, decision making, problem solving. Of course, emotional intelligence, or the ability to read, interpret and manage one's own and others' emotions, is also part of these skills.

#### Graphic 1:

Map-life skills: abilities for the daily life OMS, 1993



Source: National report Italy, 2022.



UNICEF (2022) defined those skills needed for success in school, life, and work, sometimes termed as “transferable skills”, “life skills,” “twenty-first-century skills,” “soft skills,” or “socio-emotional skills”. These allow young people to become agile learners and global citizens equipped to navigate personal, social, academic, and economic challenges. Transferable skills also aid those young people affected by crises better cope with trauma and build resilience.

In the world of work, emotional intelligence and social emotional skills are becoming increasingly important. It was included by the World Economic Forum in the top ten skills job seekers should have, as confirmed by the Workplace Trend 2018 study by the Sodexo Group (2018). Skills such as working in a team are becoming increasingly important but, according to experts, are less and less mastered by young people.

Nevertheless, policy and conceptual challenges, concerns on sensitivity to socio-cultural differences within communities and a lack of adequate training for teachers in SEL, erode confidence in the uniform and successful implementation of programs throughout the EU (Cefai C. et.al. , 2018). A number of reforms and guidelines are constantly updated and provided by the EU to promote SEL in European schools. One example is the guidelines for a systemic, whole-school approach (Cefai, Simoes, & Caravita, 2021).

### 2.2.2 Policy and guidelines of educational national institutions

One result of the research is that SEL is not always a compulsory subject in the national curricula of the project partners. There are few, or in some cases no, clearly defined, comprehensive programmes on the subject that are offered in a structured way in schools. The Hungarian report found a deficit of SEL in the Hungarian education system and Croatia complains about lack of structure and regularity in reaching all children at all school levels. SEL programs are mostly conducted occasionally, in a disorganised manner, and fragmentarily (one or several workshops for a selected sample of educational groups/classes) (National report Croatia, 2022).

An international comparative meta-study analysis identified four effective indicators for selecting and implementing SEL programs. These make up the acronym SAFE: sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (National report Austria, 2022). SEL appears in the curricula as an extracurricular activity or on a voluntary basis, like Health Education lessons in Cyprus or Social Learning in some schools in Austria. SEL can be found among the objectives of the national curriculum in Hungary and in the didactic principles of the Austrian curricula. The Croatian Report says that there is no detailed description of SEL in the school education act and the Cyprus report mentions that a specific definition of well-being in education is lacking. In some countries, such as Austria, Croatia or Cyprus, there are different platforms that provide information on the implementation and realisation of SEL in practice.

These facts show that it depends on the schools and the teachers whether and how SEL occurs in the schools. Especially the attitude and enthusiasm of the teachers was identified as an



important factor during the research. The research also found that teachers' training, competencies, and knowledge of SEL is a crucial factor in the prevalence and proper use of SEL in schools. The Austrian, Croatian, Cypriot, and Hungarian reports mention a lack of teaching staff competencies.

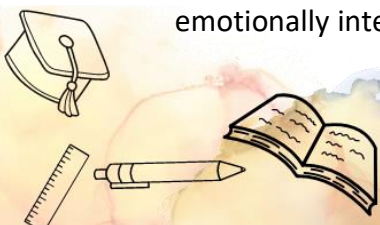
The Austrian report says that there are no compulsory subjects specifically on SEL for all education students at university and for the Hungarian teacher education policy SEL is not an utmost task.

In Italy only recently, the Italian Parliament has taken its first steps, with the law proposal (No. 2782 of 13/11/2020), titled "Provisions on the experimental teaching of emotional intelligence education in schools of all levels" aimed at introducing non-cognitive skills at school and enhancing emotional skills in the curriculum. law proposal, approved by the Chamber on 11/1/2022 (now awaiting approval by the Senate) speaks of now curricular emotional intelligence to effectively combat bullying, educational poverty, school dropout, and other deviant phenomena by fostering the recovery of lost emotional vocabulary, the improvement of the relational climate-both among students and between students, teachers, and families; the improvement of learning environments; the relaxation of relations between the educational institution and families; and the prevention of cases of isolation and early onset of pathologies among adolescents. If the proposal is approved swiftly by the Senate starting from the next school year (2022/23), a voluntary national pilot for the inclusion of activities aimed at the development of non-cognitive skills and a teacher training activity will begin. Under the law proposal, more hours of teaching will not be required in Italy, but schools participating in the experimentation will be required to revise the teaching method and introduce life skills and emotional competencies into the curricula. (From national report Italy, 2022)

Cyprus had tightened regulations during the Corona pandemic: Cyprus' response to the COVID-19 pandemic was the complete shutdown of all in-school operations and the provision of online classes. However, teachers and students were not permitted to share their videos during online classes resulting in lessons taking the form of audio lectures with no participation from students. No measure was taken to improve or even address student well-being during digital learning (European Commission, 2021a).

### 2.2.3 Definition and Application of emotional education

Socio-emotional education (SEL) is said to have its origins in the works of the philosopher Plato, who advocated a sound and holistic education system that would produce not only intellectuals but also citizens of good moral judgment and character (National Report Hungary, 2022). Socio-emotional learning involves learning and acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to understand one's feelings and those of others and to be able to act accordingly in social situations. Emotional Education is an educational approach geared toward developing and enhancing emotional intelligence in children and young people (Goleman, 1998). Being emotionally intelligent means knowing how to manage the unpleasant emotions that we will



inevitably face throughout our lives. The ability to reflect on one's moods, make meaning of the emotional experience one is going through, and have the skills to get through it while sustaining difficulties are all part of the set of emotional intelligence. It can be learned at all ages.

SEL is defined as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set, and achieve positive goals, feel, and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions' (CASEL, 2017 cited in Ljubetić, Maglica, 2020).

CASEL (2022) defines five basic skills that can and should be developed through SEL programmes:

- self-awareness,
- social awareness,
- self-management,
- responsible decision making and
- relationship management.

These so-called soft skills or life skills lead to positive and adaptive behaviours, which make the individual able to cope effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Positive effects of SEL can be found in the areas of school performance, school commitment, health promotion and prevention. The promotion of life skills plays an important role in preventing addiction and in preventing emotional and behavioral disorders as well as in preventing bullying and violence.

Meta analyses show that SEL has a positive effect on children's development, their socio-emotional competencies, prosocial behaviour, empathy, problem-solving skills, school performance, reading achievement, etc. It helps students to better regulate their own emotions, show patience and perseverance, solve problems better and develop empathy for themselves and others (M., Methlagl,P., Vogl). Empathy and emotional intelligence serve to improve educational success by preventing functional illiteracy, educational poverty, and school dropout. According to Reicher H and Matischek (2018) "SEL is the prerequisite for participation and social commitment on the way to becoming a critical and responsible citizen".

The results of the research show that SEL programs are present and that there are several organizations and institutions which provide them and information and material about them. Some examples are included below.

An Action Plan on "Health Education and the prevention of Delinquency" has been issued whereby all school units need to develop a plan based on the specific needs and characteristics of each school, approved by students and staff members whilst taking advantage of cooperation with parents and the community.

MOEC also offers a number of Health Education programmes to those schools that wish to participate. One example is the two year "Well-being" programme where participating schools in Greece and Cyprus explore one issue relating to health such as smoking, alcohol,





food, and drugs (MOEC, 2022).  
(From national report Cyprus, 2022)

The PATH-RASTEM program started in six preschool institutions in Zagreb as an exception. It was accomplished by the scientists of the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences of the University of Zagreb, with topics such as, 1) understanding feelings and developing self-control, 2) interpersonal problem solving, 3) peer relationships/friendship and 4) developing self-respect in children, presented through 37 lectures. The program was a success with its positive changes being evident after first year of implementation (Ljubetić, Maglica, 2020).

In 2014 the Ministry of Science, Education, and Sports adopted the Program of inter-subject and inter-disciplinary contents for the Citizenship education for elementary schools and high schools that can be implemented as a special subject or an inter-subject (From national report Croatia, 2022).

The initiative "Wohlfühlzone Schule ("Well-being Zone School") from the Federal Ministry of Education works on health promotion (psychosocial health) and violence and (cyber) bullying prevention. For the purpose of this initiative, projects are running in six different federal states and 15-25 schools per state via the local University of Education (<https://wohlfuehlzone-schule.at/Initiative-Wohlfuehlzone-Schule>).

Teachers can find various materials and supporting links on the associated website. For example, the link to ePOPs from ÖZEPS (österreichisches Zentrum für Persönlichkeitsbildung und Soziales Lernen). „ePOPs“ are downloadable handouts and character-building portfolios for teachers (<https://www.epop.at/>).

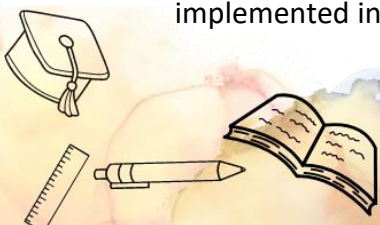
An online tool that can be used by all schools for self-analysis is AVEO („Austrian Violence Evaluation Online Tool). This is a self-evaluation tool that helps to select an appropriate violence prevention strategy for schools.

The internet platform GIVE (of the Service Agency for Health Promotion in Austrian Schools) offers materials and programme recommendations on the topic of SEL, currently also on the topic of Corona and school (<https://www.give.or.at/>).

(From national report Austria, 2022)

Emotional competences are needed in all areas of life, at school as well as at home or at work. It is important to develop these competences from childhood onwards. It is particularly important to provide children and young people with tools to overcome critical issues and make them able to assert themselves in life. School is the only place where all children and young people can be reached. But one single educational experience in this direction is not enough. A process is needed that lasts throughout life.

According to different opinions, there are two approaches on how SEL could be better implemented in school practice. On the one hand, it is necessary for teachers to have a basic



knowledge and understanding of concepts derived from research in the social sciences. On the other hand, schools must be supported from the outside, from providing information about different programs to monitoring how the different programs can be adapted to the respective school. School social work could be included here, for example (National Report Austria, 2022).

## 2.3 Early school leaving

### 2.3.1 Definitions and national data

Most of the partner countries (Austria, Cyprus, Hungary and Italy), used the definition of the European Commission of Early School Leaving (ESL), which refers to *young people between the age of 18-24 who have no more than a lower secondary level graduation or less and are currently not in any education or training*.

While the EU 27 average was at 9,7% in 2021, with the aim of dropping below 9% by 2030, national data varies. In Austria, ESL rate in 2021 was at 8%, in Cyprus at 10,2%, Hungary at 12% and Italy at 12,7% (Eurostat, 2022).

Croatia uses a different definition in its national context, in which it states that ‘Dropping-out is the interruption of the education of a student who enrolled in high school, but who did not successfully complete it and did not obtain a certificate but dropped out before completing the enrolled high school program’ (Rumberger, 2011). There is also no systematic national monitoring of ESL in Croatia. The most affected groups of ESL are migrants (Austria, Cyprus, Hungary), members of the Roma community in Croatia and Hungary, as well as, male students and students from rural areas.

### 2.3.2 Main elements and connection between early school leaving and pedagogical Approaches

Early school leaving is a multifaceted issue that presents itself in an array of intertwined conditions, such as socio-economic factors, personal issues, family-related factors, and individual educational challenges (National Report Cyprus, 2022). With this in mind, the National Report of Croatia stresses, that approaches trying to prevent ESL should reach out to a wider community, including families of students and social welfare centres.

However, the national reports of Cyprus and Austria detect a more structural component of ESL, segregation. The Austrian school system is a highly segregated one (not only in terms of special needs schools). Correlations have been indicated, where in regions where more special needs schools are located and in which students with migration backgrounds are over



proportionally represented), the number of ESL is higher than in other regions. Also, the segregation of non-German speaking students in special language classes, that results in their separation from classmates, was seen as a major setback for inclusion in the Austrian school system and might have influenced their high percentage of early school leavers with a migrant background. Also in Cyprus, there is a strong focus on Greek language, showing in additional language classes for non-Greek speakers and since students with migration backgrounds are more at risk of ESL, this is worth to look at.

Negating the usefulness of teaching other subjects and developing the skills of migrant students in for example Maths, Physics and Emotional education, in favour of the development of the Greek language, only results in further segregating the latter - both socially (separate Greek classes for foreign speakers) and academically (low proficiency in basic skills). Research into the usefulness of educational practices in migrant student communities indicates that “combining language with content learning is effective and it should not be delayed for reasons of lacking language proficiency” (European Commission, 2017 cited in the National report Cyprus, 2022).

Some policy suggestions from the European Commission (for example, to widen the primarily language-focused teaching support to include other competencies and school subjects, such as maths and science, or support diversity and antiracism education through training and other measures) should be implemented in a whole school approach including systemic changes in school curricula and teaching approaches (National Report Cyprus, 2022).

The Hungarian national report also stresses the contribution of poor emotional competences and less wellbeing at school as a factor for ESL. Multifaceted approaches at the curricular, didactic, individual, and organisational level can be used to promote and infuse SEL in the school context (Cefai et al., 2018) and in its consequence alter the numbers of ESL (National Report Hungary, 2022).

## 2.4 Competences and needs of teachers and educators

### 2.4.1 Competences and skills

Some national reports state that Secondary Education staff are often inadequately trained and lack knowledge about pupils with special educational needs (SEN) or SEL. For example, the Croatian report points out that teachers often receive too little knowledge and support to promote SEL in students (or in themselves). There is a need to invest in developing teacher’s competences on inclusive practices, especially those helping minority students, students with special educational needs and gifted students. Furthermore, the report concludes that there is a need for more systematic reflection on initial and in-service teacher professional development with regard to the education of children from vulnerable groups (National Report Croatia, 2022).



The Hungarian report mentions that not every Hungarian teacher acquires sufficient knowledge about SEN. The teacher training curriculum plays a crucial role in equipping educators with the necessary competences and skills. The lack of mandatory specialised initial training for newly arrived teachers on pedagogies of inclusion, intercultural education, and special educational needs, restricts the reformation of education in Cyprus (National Report Cyprus, 2022). One of the essential objectives of teacher education should be to prepare practitioners adequately for upcoming challenges with the appropriate knowledge and methods needed to teach disabled students and those with diverse abilities (National Report Hungary, 2022). Most educators are not sufficiently prepared to work with students with special needs through their initial education; most of them expressed the need for continuous professional development in the field of inclusive education (National report Croatia, 2022; Dragojević, 2019).

Some reports state that courses on inclusive education and SEL are only optional in the curriculum of universities or if you take a special Masters course on the subject, as is the case in Austria. At universities where these issues are stressed, pre-service teachers receive intensive and in-depth training on effective teaching methods for SEN students. However, there are no compulsory courses for student teachers on how to deal with SEN students (National report Hungary, 2022). In contrast to the pedagogical education mandated by primary educators, secondary educators are often under skilled in modern pedagogical practices (National Report Cyprus, 2022). Teachers' and school administrators' attitudes towards inclusive education and SEL are increasingly coming into focus, as highlighted for example in the Hungarian report. It is important to be aware of the impact that teacher's attitude towards students has on their success and motivation (National report Croatia, 2022). Key factors for inclusive education and SEL in schools are a positive attitude of teachers towards the issues. Knowledge of the crucial importance of SEL in school performance, motivation, health promotion, prevention and dealing with diversity is the basis for a SEL-friendly attitude and conviction among school administrators and teachers (National report Austria, 2022).

Socio-emotional learning is deeply connected with the way the teacher deals with the class, the activities he/she chooses, the interactional schemes he proposes. Special attention should be paid to it. Teachers and educators should observe and monitor the class in order to better identify the formative needs of everyone. Basically, formative needs are what students need to be successful. To fulfil formative needs, tools are needed to identify misconceptions, struggles or learning gaps and find a way to support students with their specific needs in mind. In addition, meeting formative needs means instilling values in children and young people that build active citizenship in order to become active, responsible and, whenever possible, balanced, and satisfied people. This can be done by introducing specific activities, interaction schemes and specific content. The teachers should be able to use scaffolding techniques (social emotional scaffolding). This should happen every day and should be an integral part of the teaching/learning process (National report Italy, 2022).

SEL can be promoted by teachers through sensitive, child-oriented pedagogical relationships. Some social skills cannot be learned through instruction but through implicit and informal learning, through personal experience, action, observation, and imitation. Students can be





supported through stimulating learning experiences, concrete opportunities for trial and error and constructive feedback. That is why a key factor for inclusive education and SEL is the teacher (National report Austria, 2022).

By seeing their teachers as everyday role models, students can learn to cope with stress, for example. Good and warm teacher-student relationships can improve both academic achievement and well-being in schools. It is therefore important to invest in teachers and their socio-emotional skills (National Report Croatia, 2022). Being a role model for someone who is able to actively listen to themselves and others, empathise with and show genuine interest in students and colleagues could encourage students to emulate this behaviour and recognise its validity inside and outside school (National report Italy, 2022).

A change of perspective in education is necessary. The first step to motivation is success. If the system promotes competition, there will always be students who drop out of school. If success and well-being are promoted, the opposite will happen (National report Italy, 2022). SEL should not be seen as an additional task that needs to be accommodated. The benefits of SEL are currently not perceived enough by teachers, although studies show that teachers experience relief in their daily school life through SEL programmes (National report Austria, 2022; H., Reicher and M. Maticsek).

#### 2.4.2 Training needs

The Hungarian report speaks of an increasing number of students diagnosed with SEN in school systems worldwide. Given the diversity of the student body in today's schools, educators must strive to create a system that reflects and celebrates diversity and enables children to achieve high standards (National report Italy, 2022).

With the increase in the percentages of students with different language backgrounds and migrant biographies, teachers are more than ever in need of comprehensive training and resources, raising awareness on multilingualism, multiculturalism, and educational approaches of inclusion (National report Cyprus, 2022). In Cyprus SEN students are often taught by teachers, who do not possess qualifications or background in teaching students with higher needs and with learning differences (Symeonidou, 2017). In Hungary not every teacher acquires adequate knowledge of SEN. Teachers often do not feel competent enough to teach children with special needs. Children with higher social and emotional needs are an especially big challenge in the classroom. In this respect evidence-based approaches are needed to support them (National report Austria, 2022).

A survey conducted in 69 primary schools (Bouillette, 2013) in Croatia showed that teachers would like to receive more specific advice, as well as more concrete assistance in the education of students with disabilities.

A survey conducted in 2017 (Muslić et al.) on the needs for knowledge and competencies in the field of mental health protection of 2,027 teachers, professors, associates and principals



from 170 primary schools and 83 secondary schools in Croatia showed that almost all (97.7%) have shown a willingness to seek help for students with a problem, but feel insecure (70.6%) in their own ability to provide assistance.  
(From national report Croatia, 2022)

In Cyprus compulsory staff trainings promoting an inclusive school environment is advocated. It is considered important that teachers are equipped with socio-emotional skills so that they can better deal with mixed-abilities classes. To this end, non-compulsory seminars and trainings to in-service educators are offered with the aim of providing teachers with further training in the areas of crisis, violence, and delinquency management as well as mental resilience. However, participation in trainings is limited, uneven and unsatisfactory (National report Cyprus, 2022).

Initial and in-service training for teachers helps them to expand their scope of action and strengthen their self-efficacy. Professional training of teachers in topics related to inclusive education and SEL is crucial. In-service training on the topic is offered for active teachers by Universities of Education and teacher training colleges, but it is not compulsory. The Austrian report describes the possibility of peer approaches at teacher level as a method in in-service trainings. Teachers could share their experiences and expertise on inclusive education and SEL with other schools on a collegial level (National report Austria, 2022).

Teachers need to acquire socio-emotional skills themselves. Taking care of improving one's socio-emotional skills means doing something good for oneself and one's students. In practice, it is necessary to identify activities that enable students to become aware of their socio-emotional skills, then put them into practice and grasp their value. Indirect practice during teaching activities, such as through the use of cooperative learning as a methodology in the classroom, could enable students to apply their socio-emotional skills to learning. Metacognitive reflection before, during and after a SEL activity, serves to make students more aware of them and therefore become more autonomous and responsible in dealing with them (National report Italy, 2022).

In the Croatian report, among others, the following measures for teachers are recommended: emotion-oriented training, relationship-building interventions, and resilience training. Teachers in Croatia pointed out that they need workshops on topics like knowledge in the field of choice theory, preventive work, supervision, motivation techniques and psychotherapeutic methods, communication, working with children at risk, techniques, and methods of motivating students for schooling.

“Teachers are not sufficiently familiar with cross-curricular topics and ways to bring them closer to their students. What is not clear to teachers cannot be qualitatively presented to their students” (National report Croatia, 2022).



## 2.5 Formative needs of vulnerable students

### 2.5.1 Definitions

All students are unique. The most effective method of learning varies between individuals. This is particularly true for vulnerable students who often either need additional or differing forms of support. Being able to identify vulnerable students is the first step in providing them with the support they need to ensure they receive the high-quality education they deserve. This is why it is crucial that teachers and educators are aware of what distinguishes vulnerable students. The overarching definition of a vulnerable student is *a young person who requires extra support with their education*. It is a broad term which encompasses several types of individuals. For example, it may be students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), those with either mental or physical health issues, young people with behavioural difficulties such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) or emotional disturbance, or students who are in difficult circumstances which have led to them needing extra attention (From National Report Italy, 2022).

In addition to the groups of students named above, the following should also be considered: members of (disadvantaged) minorities (for example, members of the Roma community in Croatia and Hungary), members of the LGBTQIA+ community, victims of abuse, students with migrant backgrounds, young mothers, as well as, students with higher academic capabilities that may face difficulties in their socio-emotional development, such as social skills and empathy. It is important to emphasise that these are not uniform categories of exclusive groups. They can intersect and create their own unique dynamics of vulnerability and needs (National Report Cyprus, 2022; National Report Croatia, 2022).

The identification of an individual as “vulnerable” does not necessarily imply a permanence. A series of events or circumstances might make a student more vulnerable than another, and that with the right provision of support to satisfy higher needs the latter might no longer be deemed as “vulnerable”. This might take a few weeks or months but will eventually no longer be necessary once the situation is resolved or the positive benefits come into play (National Report Italy, 2022).

### 2.5.2 Formative needs and strategies

Students have varying needs, they learn at differing rates and in various ways. Therefore, the most effective way to support them is by offering *flexibility*. A flexible learning environment can help students remain engaged with their learning.

An inclusive curriculum should thus:

- give attention to the different learning processes and an emphasis on scaffolding also promoting the passage of additional information and background with mind maps and other less traditional and formal teaching tools.



- encourage group and pair work, which allows for initiating or consolidating tutoring and mentoring experiences.
- implement and encourage learning to learn, cooperating, interacting with peers and the environment.

These are the focal points of the learning skills to be developed. They guide the student to become autonomous in his or her learning. It also leads to motivation for all students to continue studying.

Other formative needs that are less important, refer to socio- emotional issues and can involve high performance, low performance, and special needs students. Some of the most common are:

- high levels of anxiety
- self-criticism
- tendency to magnify imperfections
- criticism of others
- reluctance to try new things
- difficulty sharing responsibility in group work
- feelings of inadequacy
- being preoccupied with grades and results

Metacognitive strategies are thus very important. Here socio-emotional learning involves the:

- development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to a healthy self-image
- the management of emotions
- the achievement of individual and group goals
- the maintenance of supportive relationships
- the ability to make good decisions

(From National Report Italy, 2022)

Of importance are the formative needs of vulnerable students. Global perspectives on what defines vulnerable children highlight the intersections of poverty, disability, learning and language barriers (Bulat & Gove, 2022). [...] This highlights the need for differentiated instruction and flexible teaching practices in mixed-abilities classrooms (Μπαίτελμαν, 2021), whereby educators are expected to adapt the learning environment, content, process and outcome based on the student's readiness, interests and learning style (Tomlinson & Imbeu,







2010) following the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2011) (National Report Cyprus, 2022).



## 3 Field research findings and results

### 3.1 Summary of focus group findings and results

#### 3.1.1 Focus group teachers

A total of 28 teachers participated in the focus groups in the 5 partner countries. Of these, 4 participated in Austria, 5 in Croatia, 5 in Cyprus, 6 in Hungary and 8 in Italy. The majority were lower and upper secondary school teachers. One was an elementary school teacher.

The project included a focus group activity with secondary school teachers to gather feedback on the possibility of implementing inclusive education in schools, promoting well-being, and combating early school leaving with new approaches and participation practices. A total of 27 teachers from lower and upper secondary schools from 5 different countries participated in the focus group meetings. One participant was a teacher at a primary school.

The purpose of the focus groups was to collect teachers' reflections on the impact of the pandemic and on pedagogical strategies and tools that are useful and effective in addressing students' differing learning competencies and personal educational needs. Another goal is to use the information gathered to combat school dropout and support vulnerable students to succeed in school. For this purpose, the topics were divided into four parts during the meetings.

#### Part 1: IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Austria, Croatia, and Hungary stressed that there are both negative and positive experiences resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns. According to one Cypriot teacher, teaching during the pandemic highlighted the basic needs of the system and enabled teachers to use alternative means that need to be reassessed and improved. For example, teachers need to be trained in distance education methods, distance education needs to be evaluated, and tablets should be made available to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Austrian teachers said that there has been a digitalisation push in schools, for example the provision of laptops to students. A new subject is starting for all schools in autumn 2022 called “digital basic education”. This topic was previously taught through other subjects. Hungarian teachers report that teachers' IT skills have developed in parallel with those of students. Online education has made teachers aware that school education is much more than just passing on information. The availability of online content provides an immediate opportunity to incorporate spontaneous ideas and associations into lessons. Online teaching was facilitated by various tools and apps available online, but teachers underused the tools that were effective for inclusion (National Report Hungary, 2022).

One Croatian teacher said that online education opens up opportunities for her to participate in more education. Another teacher pointed out that she really hates online courses and does



not see anything positive in them because, for example, students had their cameras turned off and it was hard to tell what they were doing and if they were even listening.

Smaller groups and separate classes made it possible to experience and see the abilities of the quieter and introverted students. Teachers noticed a strengthening of the self-confidence of students through one-to-one support and self-structuring. Tasks could be (re)discussed individually by email and students had to create their own weekly schedules, which made them realise afterwards how much they were actually doing (National Report Austria, 2022).

A less formal school setting contributed to a more personalised student-teacher relationship. Some students were better able to adapt to online teaching than others. "It can be a burden for them to be socially present in a class. That's taken off their shoulders..." Online learning gave all participants the opportunity to get to know each other better by having, for example, dogs, cats, or someone's brother appear on the screen during the lesson. The disruption of the daily learning routine due to the pandemic benefited some students (National Report Hungary, 2022).

Croatian teachers state that this form of teaching is beneficial for quiet and withdrawn students. Some students, that for example struggle with anxiety related to public speaking, found better ways of exceling and achieving better results. Mathematics teachers, in the Cypriot focus group, that used drawing tablets noted that it allowed them to give direct feedback to the students in real time, something that was well received by students. The teachers noted that high-performing students were more able to organise their own schedules because of distance learning, which allowed them to focus more on the aspects where they felt they had limitations.

A negative aspect reported by Italian teachers was the strong impact of the lockdowns on students' relationships and motivation. Many students felt depressed and stressed after the pandemic. The experience of distance learning has unfortunately proven to be very limiting in terms of learning, relationships, and motivation.

In Cyprus one out of five teachers mentioned the negative psychological effect of the pandemic on students. Hungarian teachers observed a lot of tension and anxiety developing in schools during the almost two years of online (or hybrid) education, amongst both students and teachers. Teachers reported that there were one to two students in each class who dropped out completely during the period of online education. The reasons varied, with some reporting family or social issues as examples.

Some students were lost to the school during the pandemic and the distance learning, more than before. The pandemic has pushed everyone, including teachers, school psychologists or social workers to their limits (National Report Austria, 2022). Online teaching required teachers to dedicate much more time in preparation than traditional teaching, something that was mentally and physically demanding (National Report Hungary, 2022). Participants in Croatia pointed out, that they are now available 24 hours a day, which is often abused. All seminars for teachers are now online and always take place in the teachers' free time. Croatian teachers said that teaching during the pandemic is or was particularly difficult when it came to practical lessons.



Also, an Austrian teacher emphasised that distance learning was very difficult for his subject that was heavily reliant on practical, hands-on handicraft work. Hungarian teachers reported that often students were solving tasks on an online platform through which there was no personal contact between teachers and students. According to Cypriot teachers, the students' level of knowledge and motivation was reduced. One teacher noted that high achievers maintained their engagement and learning, while lower ability students drifted away as they were unable to follow their peers. In Cyprus teaching during the pandemic was significantly impacted due to the restriction imposed on both teachers and students in using video calling when teaching through Microsoft Teams.

The most important lesson teachers have learned from their experiences is the need to listen to students' intrinsic needs and feelings and to personalise learning strategies. Well-being and inclusion are the first aspects to be considered for a positive learning process (National Report Italy, 2022).

## Part 2: RELATION BETWEEN POSITIVE PERFORMANCE AT SCHOOLS/WELLBEING AT SCHOOLS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION APPROACHES

### Early School Leaving (ESL):

The Italian school system has a structural problem with early school leaving and student failure in secondary education. The transition between middle schools and high schools is a critical step for many students, as educational guidance processes are inadequate to help students with difficulties in choosing a school path that matches their competences, interests, and talents.

Many school leavers in Austria leave school, because they realise that school or this particular school is not the right thing for them and that it is better to do or learn something else such as through vocational training.

The Hungarian school where the teachers participating in the focus group teach, strive to provide equal opportunities, but this has its limitations at an institutional level (financial and human resources). Schools could have a lower drop-out rate if special attention was paid to those at risk, not only at a teacher's level but also at an institutional level (National Report Hungary, 2022).

Among other things, Austrian teachers said that the school system is often to blame for early school leaving (ESL). Students are told what they cannot do, but not what they are good at or that they are good at something. Self-efficacy is not tangible for the students in this system. In Hungary strong socio-cultural influences are cited behind early school leaving, dropouts and learning poverty. Economic or social dysfunctionality of families is cited as a leading cause.

A Cypriot teacher stated that it is the foreign students who drop out due to a lack of adequate Greek language skills. Two teachers stated that there is a constant pressure from parents to





follow career paths and take classes in schools for which students are not motivated, resulting in them performing worse or leaving school early.

Also, Austrian teachers reported that often parents are the reason for ESL, who choose school for their children and want them to finish high school, even if the child wants to do or learn something else.

Another problem mentioned by Italian teachers is the use of traditional and formal methods by which teachers are not able to engage students and create participatory learning processes.

One reason for ESL, according to Austrian teachers, is the lack of early support for all students, for example for partial performance disorders, which often results in students getting bad grades when they shouldn't have. In the school where the Croatian focus group participants teach, dropouts are rare and when they do occur, it is usually due to chaotic living situations.

### School-based strategies to reduce inequalities

According to Austrian teachers an important school-based strategy to reduce inequalities among students is strengthening the community. At this particular school, which was the focus in Hungary, the teachers meet once a week to discuss individual cases. They discuss the development, situation and condition of whole classes or individual students. A Hungarian school psychologist who participated in the focus group mentioned that it was important to ask each other for help. One Croatian teacher said that the most important thing is to be human and show understanding for students' needs.

Austrian teachers were unanimous, that an important school-based strategy to reduce inequalities among students is inclusion in all types of schools (whilst currently there are integration classes only in elementary, compulsory, and new secondary middle schools). In grammar schools or high schools, in practice, there are almost no pupils with special needs, such as those based on language or on some kind of disability. If all schools had what is assumed as integration classes, then diversity (in all possible areas) would become normal for all children. The students would always embrace and practice diversity, something that they would later carry on into their professional life.

Some teachers stressed, that children should not be split after elementary school into different (types of) schools. They should stay longer with their schoolmates/friends and have more time to decide what they want to do, learn, or work. One teacher talked about it being absurd that you first divide and then expect a divided system to be inclusive (From National Report Austria, 2022).

The Hungarian focus group concludes that inclusive education and experiencing diversity makes children more tolerant. Participating teachers believe that cooperative learning and inclusive education have a positive long-term impact on the labour market too. In addition to awareness-raising tools, the role of the teacher as a model in this process is emphasised. The school in which the participants teach try to address inequalities through sensitisation, for example, by developing projects with schools from very different socio-cultural backgrounds.



Croatian teachers pointed out that students like handicraft work, outdoor classrooms, project days, implementing student ideas, such as painting on the walls, solving problems independently, therefore lessons that are more practical in nature and less theory based. Also an Austrian teacher said, that students and their teachers should get out of the school building much more, to visit for example companies, businesses, farms and take city tours or other excursions. Italian teachers suggested encouraging students' participation in extracurricular activities as this contributes to the development of civic skills and competences.

In Cyprus the participating art teacher explained that she uses a personal and individual lesson plan for all her students, as some are artistically gifted, and others are not.

A Croatian teacher explains that she chooses methods that are proven to produce better results and avoids ways of working that she knows might make students feel incompetent. Students are given a range of options in her school just to finish school.

The most important lesson Italian teachers have learned from their experience is the need to listen to students' intrinsic needs and feelings and to personalise learning strategies. Well-being and inclusion are the first aspects to be considered for a positive learning process. Individual development is very important, but at the institutional level there are many obstacles to this, with the most significant being a lack of human resources. Another difficulty is that the national core curriculum does not leave enough room for individual development, given the extent of individual differences between pupils (National Report Hungary, 2022).

Austrian teachers stressed that the school (system) needed more time for non-formal methods like the buddy-system or peer groups. One teacher had a good experience with the buddy-system at his school, but he said that it is difficult to find enough time for it because it has to happen within the class periods for pre-existing and scheduled lessons. There is no extra time for it.

The Croatian participants teach at a vocational school and report about a lack of books for vocational subjects and about the problem of the abolition of history in vocational schools. One of the participants stated that "... children in vocational schools will be deprived of general topics".

The whole education system should be reformed to facilitate more effective education. In the absence of this, the school tries to help with its own means and to use external resources, for example cooperation in projects with foundations and NGOs with expertise in the field (National Report Hungary, 2022).

Participants in the Cypriot focus group noted that the current education system is suitable for students with average to higher academic ability.



### Part 3: TEACHERS' COMPETENCE IN THE LEARNING FIELD OF INCLUSIVE AND EMOTIONAL EDUCATION - FORMATIVE NEEDS OF TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS

The Italian report finds that teachers' skills should be aimed at defining personal learning pathways for vulnerable pupils or pupils with special educational needs. Another important competence of teachers mentioned is their own emotional and psychological management.

Austrian teachers agreed that inclusion in all types of schools is needed so that all teachers learn to deal with it (with assistance). Teachers need accompaniment and support to cope with all kinds of school tasks. One teacher replied that unfortunately, inclusion is not the classical approach in general high schools in Austria.

Four out of five Cypriot teachers believe that if they know the students' background and interests, they can offer projects and activities that are tailored to the students. In this way, students are encouraged to participate in lessons that match their interests. Equally important is the feedback from the students to the teachers.

Hungarian teachers emphasise the importance of in-service training for teachers in schools. They deal with topics such as ADHD, dyslexia, dysgraphia, etc. The in-service training is aimed at all teachers in the school. Cooperative learning methods are used in the courses to also improve relationships between colleagues.

The shortcomings of teacher training are that it deals with imaginary situations and writing lesson plans for imaginary classes, which then fails in practice and teachers lack the tools and knowledge to deal with unexpected situations in real life.... Sharing good practices could also play an important role in teacher training.... The need for individual training for teachers is emphasised. How to solve and manage problems and situations with different teacher personalities. Different teacher personalities lead to different solutions, there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. Sharing good practice is seen as a priority in this area, "So that if someone has a reputation for being an outstanding teacher, and they give lessons that everybody loves, then you can visit their lessons, or at least have a video of one of their lessons that you can study" (From National Report Hungary, 2022).

The Croatian participants also wish to have concrete examples from the practice of children's and teachers' problems, which will show how other teachers have come up with something. They report that you hear a lot about theories and then when you are in a certain situation with a student, you don't know exactly what needs to be done, for example when it comes to a student's mental health. Class teachers often do not know whether they are allowed to talk to pupils about certain topics. There is some uncertainty about the rules in certain situations. The Croatian teachers agree on the importance of an individual approach to the student but stress that they do not know how to behave in certain situations where students approach them and they are afraid that some of their advice might cause more harm. They would like to see lecturers in teacher training who do not come with the attitude that it is always the teachers' fault, that their questions are stupid and that their fears are stupid.



In Austria, not even all types of secondary schools are covered at the University of Education. So how should a young teacher be prepared for different situations? Teachers need more internships to be well prepared for school life. In Austria, there are no more teaching internships. Students start working as fully-fledged teachers already during their Masters' thesis.

The problem with internal training opportunities in the school of the Hungarian participants is the lack of specialists in the fields of individual development and inclusive education.

Teachers miss being heard by higher authorities. They cannot really change anything in the system. One teacher said that she was randomly selected to go to the Ministry of Education in Vienna to work on a new curriculum. She quickly realised, however, that this was only a pro forma event so that the ministry could say that the curriculum was created with the help of different teachers from the different provinces. According to the latter, "In reality, they already had a finished curriculum in the drawer there and you didn't actually get a say as a teacher" (From National Report Austria, 2022).

Two of the Hungarian teachers mention the time factor. Differentiated class management is the most basic prerequisite to enable individual learning paths or to make teaching reasonably adaptable or at least to overcome disadvantages, but it is an insane effort. According to one of the teachers, "In order to be able to listen to your intuition with confidence, you need to feel that you have freedom, that you have someone to talk to about your ideas, that you have time to think, and it's very difficult to do that with such a huge number of hours".

Also, the Austrian participants mentioned, that they would need much more time to work on non-formal issues.

One of the five Cypriot teachers stated that it is impossible to provide inclusive and emotional education in a class of 25 students. Although the Pedagogical Institute offers seminars on these topics, these theories are not applicable in large classes.

#### Part 4: DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE INCLUSIVE AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR VULNERABLE STUDENTS

The Italian teachers reported that there are different formative needs, different competences, and different levels of motivation to learn in classrooms today. The aspect of emotions and well-being is the basis to ensure student engagement and to promote positive learning processes.

Hungarian participants see the creation of a good school environment as essential for effective inclusive education and socio-emotional learning. Creating a school environment where all students feel safe is seen as central. At their school, special emphasis is placed on emotional education.





One Austrian teacher emphasised that more school social work is needed. She proposed a kind of “Crisis Intervention Team” for vulnerable students - additionally for “emergencies”, for example, to go straight to the family and seeing what can be done to help.

The Hungarian teachers stressed that the school psychologist plays a key role in creating the right institutional climate. Both teachers and students can approach her with their problems. One of the Cypriot teachers mentioned the negative psychological effect of the pandemic on students.

The Austrian teachers stressed, that smaller schools and classes are needed. The Italian participants concluded that educational strategies should be applied to each pupil, considering the tasks and their formative needs and abilities. Collaborative teaching methods should be encouraged during lessons, with the support of classmates and using small group activities. The use of participative methods and individual support are the most important strategies to increase the motivation of all students, to promote inclusion and prevent early school leaving. Also, the Croatian teachers agree on the importance of an individual approach to the student.

Cooperative learning is considered a very good method by the Hungarian teachers and works very well in their school and with some teachers, but it sometimes leads to its own contradictions. In exams, students are supposed to be punished if they help each other, while the cooperative method is about exactly that. This is difficult for the students to understand.

The Austrian participants emphasised that everyone around the students must form a team: teachers, special needs teachers, students themselves, parents, social workers, school psychologists, etc.

One Cypriot teacher criticised parents of students with learning disabilities and/or differences for not accepting their children’s situation and insisting that they are placed in the “regular” classroom. The latter stated that their aim is to make those students feel comfortable in classrooms, to understand what is happening around them and be socially integrated.

The Hungarian teachers mentioned that good collegial relations among teachers play a role in creating an inclusive environment in schools. The Italian participants recommend that teachers take a team approach with other teachers to ensure that each student gets the right help when needed.

At times, it is possible to step out of role of the teacher for the sake of emotional education: “If something makes me feel bad or hurt me as a person, I step out of my role as a teacher for a while, and step into the role of my private self...” (From National Report Hungary, 2022)

Students want and need more non-formal competences and practical life skills. One Austrian teacher reports that he is sometimes asked by his students whether they can learn something meaningful that they can really use in life. These things, according to teachers, should be incorporated much more into the lessons.



## EXAMPLES AND GOOD PRACTICES

The lessons of colleagues of the Hungarian participants, who have successfully used the cooperative method are visited by fellow teachers to learn them as good practices. In their school, a special programme has been developed to address bullying in an age-appropriate way. The focus is on creating a safe space. The school also has a special SEL programme. The programme addresses bullying, community building and the development of emotional intelligence, among other things. Part of the anti-bullying programme is to help students recognise and articulate their own and others' feelings. Conflict resolution is done in a restorative way with a focus on empathy.

Arts is also used in education (art, music) as tools for emotional learning and inclusive education. Art therapy can help within emotional education; "If you can draw an emotion that you may not be able to express, it can be very helpful. Or even through music." (From National Report Hungary, 2022)

Also, one Cypriot teacher stated that the one thing that disabled children need is love and that by giving them the opportunity to draw in different colours they can express themselves.

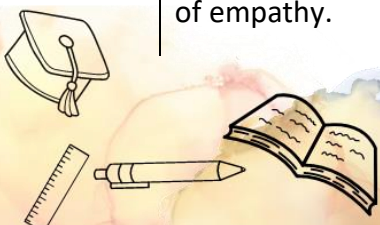
The Hungarian teachers refer that in their school particular emphasis is placed on emotional education. There is a specific board game, named 'The Realm of Emotions', that is developed and used for this purpose.

A good practice for emotional education in school is the "Arizona Room." The aim is to get the child to reflect on his or her own behaviour. There are basic principles or ground rules in the school. That is that children have the right to learn in class, teachers have the right to teach, and no one has the right to disrupt that. When someone is making the lesson impossible, or very seriously disrupting the lesson, the "Arizona room" is used as a solution. The teacher sends the child to the Arizona room with a supervising adult present. There, they fill out a paper asking them what they disrupted the lesson with, or what their unacceptable behaviour was, how they think they disrupted the lesson, or how they disrupted others, what they need to change, and if they need help from someone to do it. It is important that this should not be seen as punishment, but as help (From National Report Hungary, 2022).

The Hungarian teachers report that the teachers at their school organise special days where the form teachers spend informal time with their students. These days provide an opportunity for the students and their teachers to discuss issues and requests with each other. They are given a variety of games and activities to support this process.

One teacher mentioned the use of SENSIS cards as useful. These are cards with impulse questions for school and youth work with topics on values, relationships, etc.

As mentioned above, one teacher has good experiences with the buddy-system. Students at lower school are accompanied and supported by students at upper school. Both, the older and the younger, benefit from this. They learn by example, practice and application the concept of empathy.



The teachers think it is a good idea that topics like drug education are dealt with in peer groups.

Another teacher mentioned the so-called “ePOPs” as useful. „ePOPs“are downloadable handouts and character-building portfolios for teachers (<https://www.epop.at/>).

One teacher believes that a "German as foreign language" training for teachers would be helpful in many subjects, such as in mathematics, as it teaches you to convey content in a simplified and easy to understand language. (From National Report Austria, 2022).

The Cypriot mathematics teachers indicated that for them the best practice is a 'learning by doing' approach that they adopt in their teaching, as they believe that in this way students are 'forced' to participate and thus become involved in the lesson.

Some of the Italian teachers reported on the positive experiences with external Oxfam experts who supported them last year in the development of a workshop raising awareness on emotional development in their school. The workshop has fostered an open school environment through the use of the storytelling approach, giving students the opportunity to pay attention and be heard, to talk about themselves and their experiences during the pandemic or about the choices they are making in relation to their future school career.

Montessori pedagogy was mentioned by the Austrian teachers as a positive example of socio-emotional learning and inclusive education.

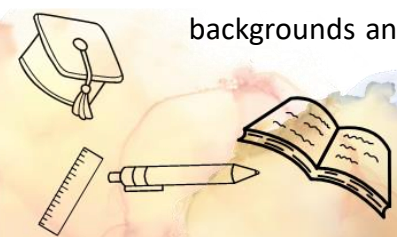
Out of the eight Italian teachers involved in the focus group, four expressed their interest to be involved in the upcoming training course on the issues of inclusive and emotional education.

The Hungarian participants were all open to attend courses on the topics discussed.

Most teachers expressed an unwillingness to participate in trainings of emotional and inclusive education unless specifically tailored to their lessons and with practical examples. They noted that the Pedagogical Institute provides these seminars once a year and that they would not like to participate further in seminars focusing on educational theory. Of significance is that the two teachers expressing more favourably about inclusion and emotional education throughout the session, were far more eager in participating in future trainings (From National Report Cyprus, 2022).

### 3.1.2 Focus group students

Focus groups with students were implemented as a part of the research activities for this project in order to collect feedback from the beneficiaries themselves about any learning loss or gain during the Covid-19 pandemic and their insights or views on the issues of inclusion, emotional education, and wellbeing in school. Altogether 44 students from different backgrounds and settings were willing to participate in this activity. Students from districts



with high migration rates (Italy), as well as students from rural (Croatia) and urban (Hungary and Cyprus) areas joined the activity. In Austria, a group of seven early school leavers were interviewed, so they could add their perspective to the research.

To better structure the debate, it was divided into two parts.

### Part 1: IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

All participants who experienced school life during the Covid-19 pandemic were impacted greatly. Online and distance learning were the most common debated issues, where students often felt left alone with problems and tasks and were not able to reach their teachers. Some students also experienced barriers to even join online classes, due to a lack of available equipment, lack of space at home and stable internet connections (Italy and Cyprus).

Participants also felt overwhelmed by the number of tasks handed to them, wishing for more coordination between different teachers, so as to be able to balance the amount of work (Austria). Time management was also an issue. Students explained that they became exhausted, that they could not rely on scheduled classes teachers might start the class earlier or work through breaks or even finish the classes much later than anticipated. They added that they needed more breaks (Croatia).

Teachers' teaching skills in online classes were marked as unsatisfactory by most students. According to students in Cyprus, it was not possible to follow the lessons properly when teachers unable to adapt to online teaching were for example, reading from a book or even had their cameras turned off so students were not able to read their expressions. In addition, some teachers were not able to assist students when they had problems with the online tools themselves. When asked about the material teachers used, the most common answer was videos. Students also felt that teachers distance learning skills evolved over time and appreciated it. Using pre-recorded video lessons, sharing tasks and presentations to students in advance or using more interactive tools like Kahoot, were well received measures by students.

Despite this negative picture, a few students also mentioned some positive effects of distance learning. Some students reported that they became more independent and learned how to organise themselves. Others for example as is the case in Cyprus reported, that they are now able to reach their teachers through online platforms, even in out of school hours, to help them, when they have questions. In addition to the academic obstacles faced by students, the latter also reported struggling socially. They stated that they experienced isolation, not only during distance learning, but also through measures of segregation at school. These experiences had also long-lasting effects on their wellbeing and motivation. One student from Cyprus stated that *"my mood has changed, and it is still affecting me to this day. I am demotivated"*.





## Part 2: RELATION BETWEEN POSITIVE PERFORMANCE AT SCHOOL/WELLBEING AT SCHOOL AND TEACHING METHODS

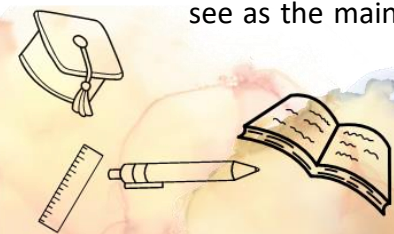
Participants were asked if they worked on the topic of emotions in their school. The most common answer was no with the exception of students in Croatia where the latter received many workshops on this issue. Nevertheless, the latter did not find them helpful. In Italy, students participated in a project on emotions by Oxfam in the same year and their teachers were trying to adopt the methodologies into their lessons. For the rest of the students, the topic of emotions was pretty much left to the individual teacher. In the opinion of the participants, there were teachers who cared about their students' emotions and mental health, while others remained indifferent and some others even made it worse, for example by humiliating students in front of others.

When asked what is helping or what would help students to improve their wellbeing at school, most students referred to structural components. Some already existing structures like school psychologists or social workers were considered as helpful, but not for everyone. More time to socialise, for resting and leisure was demanded and more activities that involve group work or outdoor experiences such as excursions and art projects for the whole school. Also structures for vulnerable students, like a safe space where they can withdraw to if a situation becomes too overwhelming. A student from Austria added that attending school on a flexible time schedule helped them with their mental health problems. More flexibility in general was demanded, for example, less tests and exams and more time for individual learning.

Italian students stated some of those teaching methods that they enjoyed very much. Autobiographical work as a way of stimulating and expressing emotions whilst communicating personal experiences, was perceived by students as a great way of teaching. This teaching method could also satisfy Hungarian students' requests, stating that teachers should try to get to know them better so that they can understand them better and be able to adapt to their needs.

Of interest is that in all national contexts, students explained that not all students are included in the classroom or are presented with equal opportunities. Italian students reflected that the main reason for this is the classroom environment and the students' relationships between one another, whilst also attributing language barriers as one of the main causes. Language was also a central point of discussion in both Cyprus and Austria. Some Cypriot students felt that a lot of students are excluded from mainstream classrooms, whilst others stated that placing more attention on students with language barriers this group would create a negative effect for the rest of the class. A similar discussion was held in Austria, where participants thought that students with language barriers received more attention and assistance, such as when given easier instructions to tasks and various topics. Something they explain would have helped them as well.

The vast majority of students, in almost all countries felt that teachers give preferential treatment and present favouritism for some students over others. This is something that they see as the main obstacle for equality in class. As a way to improve inclusion in class and to



have more equal opportunities, participants recommended mostly tutoring or extracurricular workshops, such as after school language workshops. In Croatia, students again held teachers accountable and stated, that their attitude towards students should change and that teachers should treat all students with respect.

In the opinion of the students, more independency and flexibility, would help them to have a better learning experience. Students also mentioned participative methods and the peer-to-peer approach as helpful tools for their learning and motivation, as well as positive encouragement.

*According to a student from Hungary, "i think it's an important question, because not everyone figures out on their own how to learn, not everyone learns in the same way. If we could either share practices (...) or if we could share them among ourselves and everybody could demonstrate them, it would be a great help. And what I have noticed from my own example is that once you get the hang of it, and you feel that you are getting positive feedback, even from teachers praising you for doing something well, then I have picked up the thread and I have no problems since then'.*

Many students mentioned that they would like to develop more practical skills or gain more practical knowledge, which would help them in daily life. For example, learn about communication, finance, or social topics and where to find help when they struggle with mental health issues.

## 3.2 Summary of questionnaire-based online survey results

In an attempt to collect information from a larger pool of people, the BE-IN's consortium disseminated within each national context two questionnaire-based online surveys, one targeting students and the other secondary education teachers. In this section, the results of the two surveys are examined and presented separately. A total of 76 students and 65 teachers participated in each survey respectively.

### 3.2.1 Teacher Online Survey

In total 65 teachers participated in the online survey. The majority of participants identified as female and teach in public schools, with the age group of students being between 11-18 years old. The participants teach in a variety of subjects, inclusive of languages, arts, natural science, and specific subjects like engineering or marketing, whilst a significant portion of the teachers has experience or works directly in an inclusive class or with inclusive methods (55%). The majority of participants also rated the atmosphere in their school as good or positive.

In terms of the pandemic, teachers observed a negative effect on students' motivation and slightly less but still a negative effect on grades and students' performance. Even if most of the teachers were able to reach their students on a regular basis during distance learning, they felt that some students were excluded from lessons during that period. The main reasons for this seemed to be technical issues as well as social problems such as struggles at home or with



friendships. The atmosphere after the distance learning period was perceived as more negative than before, with the exception of Croatia with teachers stating that the atmosphere did not change in general. Teachers are unclear as to the correlation between early school leaving and the pandemic. The latter could not definitively state that dropout rates changed significantly.

In almost all countries, the majority of the teachers stated that they can address the individual and formative needs of their students. In both Cyprus and Hungary this was perceived differently, with some stating that lack of time disabled them from addressing such needs whilst others stated that no such need was evident. During the pandemic, teachers were not able to meet the needs of students to the same extent as before.

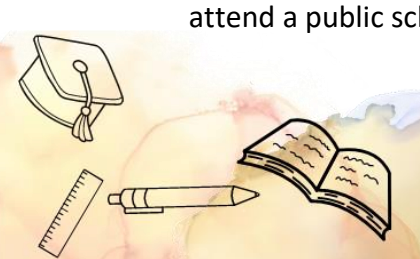
Emotional education is applied in all countries to a significant extent. According to the survey answers in Croatia and Italy a hundred percent of the participants stated that they cover emotional education learning in at least parts of their lessons. In addition, inclusive education is already implemented by the majority of teachers although not to the same extent as emotional education. Again, distance learning changed the situation for most of the participants. In Austria, Cyprus and Hungary, teachers were largely unable to conduct emotional learning or inclusive education in distance learning settings. The most common obstacles for teachers to implement either of these two pedagogical approaches are, lack of time followed by a lack of methodological and theoretical knowledge.

The main resources available to teacher enabling them to implement emotional and inclusive education, are online platforms and additional training courses. When it comes to inclusive education, a variety of methods are already being practiced. The most common used method is individual support for vulnerable students, followed by the peer-to-peer approach and participative methods. Participants in the survey identified a need for the acquisition of more methodological knowledge as well as socio-psychological knowledge, in order to apply a more inclusive educational approach to their classrooms. In terms of tools and resources needed to upskill and enable teachers to implement emotional and inclusive education in the classroom, the majority chose specialised training courses, followed by the provision of guidelines on how to implement these approaches in their classes.

The overwhelming majority of teachers registered interest for participating in a training course on these issues, favouring those that would be hosted in a blended setting (online and offline) followed by an online setting.

### 3.2.2 Students Online Survey

In total 76 students from Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary, and Italy responded to the online survey on the consequences of the Corona pandemic and distance learning as well as their perception of inclusiveness and well-being at their schools. Out of these students, 53 identify as female, 21 as male and two as none of these two categories. The majority of the participants attend a public school and are between 13 and 18 years of age.



For most of the students, the Covid-19 pandemic and distance learning had negative effects on their motivation and grades. Whilst in Austria and Italy a large percentage of students had regular contact with their teachers and classmates, the same situation did not apply in Croatia and Cyprus. Whilst most students in Croatia had regular contact with their teachers, a third of the students had no contact at all. In Cyprus, the contact in general was reduced to a few times a week and 75% of the students stated, that they felt partly or even completely left out of class. The main obstacles for student participation in distance learning in all five countries were technical problems, as well as social problems, such as problems at home or with friends. In terms of the dropout rate, with the exception of Austria where a significant number of students knew at least one person that left school because of the pandemic, the latter seems to have had little effect in the opinion of the students.

The vast majority of students in all countries (80%) felt well in their school. Most participants thought that all students have the same opportunities of success in their schools. In contrast, students in Croatia were divided on this topic, with 50% stating, that everybody has the same chances and 40% stating the opposite. Most students also thought that their teachers pay attention to their feelings and that they can turn to them for any personal matters not related to schoolwork. However, the majority of students in Austria and Cyprus stated that they could turn to their classmates when they were struggling with personal or school related problems.

Very positive is the fact that the majority of the participants responded that they had the possibility to learn in different styles. Interesting learning materials and recognition of their formative needs were very important to participants. Students felt most supported when teachers recognized their strengths and supported them. In Austria, Croatia, Italy, and Hungary, this was also put in practice and experienced by students. In Cyprus, none of the students asked (even though it was very important to them as well) felt that teachers recognized and supported their strengths, with only one third of the participants stating that to an extent teachers recognised and supported their individual abilities.

In all countries, support structures such as student counselling and extracurricular activities are present. However, only a minority of students take advantage of these on a regular basis.

Students were also asked, what competences they would like to develop in school. Self-confidence, self-awareness and key competences like communication, leadership, problem solving and public speaking, were the top three choices.

### 3.3 Summary of shadowing activity

The shadowing activities were conducted by the Italian partner in the same classroom where the focus group with the students was conducted. This was a multicultural and multilingual classroom with 20 pupils with an immigrant background. The shadowing activity included the following:





The presence of Oxfam's Inclusive Education Expert to observe social relations between students and teachers during lessons and to gather evidence of well-being in the school and of integration and social dynamics in the classroom.

The teacher involved in the activity was the Spanish teacher. The latter was positive about the idea of learning a language through the autobiographical method and sharing emotions related to the students' family of origin and respective traditional cuisine. The supervised activity consisted of proposing individual work to the students in which they talked about typical dishes and recipes of their family or country of origin. The vocabulary used served to reinforce what had previously been learned about food in the unit. The pupils were enthusiastic from the beginning and started to share their recipes and different cultural elements orally. According to the teacher, the biggest difficulty was to bring this oral exchange back into an independent work and into a written and more structured work. Each student needed the teacher's support to translate what was said. This led to a lot of confusion. On a positive note, many students talked about their families for the first time and presented a previously unknown snapshot into their lives. The tools and materials suggested were very useful and provided the starting point for future exchanges and learning, although adaptation is needed depending on the classroom setting = and dynamics.

In this case, the teacher decided not to organise the work in small groups, but individually, as the students find it difficult to work together and achieve a goal together. From the students' point of view, this was a positive step as they could express themselves and present something personal with food and language as a springboard. For some of them who were very shy or had lower skills, it was an opportunity to express themselves and be heard. The teacher confirms that she will try to incorporate this kind of work more often by paying attention to the students' emotional wellbeing and state of mind, and by making more effort in involving them in class activities.

### 3.4 Summary of stakeholder interview results

Various experts on the topics of education and inclusion participated in 22 interviews in the five national contexts.

#### Part 1: IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

In the Austrian and Hungarian interviews, the experts agreed that the pandemic had both positive and negative effects on the school system and school life. According to Austrian experts, the negative effects were an increase in mental health problems, such as eating disorders and psychosomatic complaints due to increasing pressure and lack of social contacts. The pressure to perform has increased as teachers were not fully able to deviate from the curriculum despite the difficulty of the situation. As a result, there was even less time



for the development and delivery of non-formal content. Some students did not return to school after distance learning.

Support services at Austrian schools are inclusive of guidance counsellors, school psychologists and social workers. However, these structures are not prevalent in all schools. For example, they are almost non-existent in grammar schools. In the province of Salzburg social work at schools only takes place in elementary schools, new secondary schools, and compulsory schools.

Students suddenly lost their social network at school and their usual connections with peers. Although they can retrieve their network of support following the return back to school in the post pandemic reality, their socio-emotional development has been severely impacted. For those students with developed coping mechanisms their return back to a normal" school life, might imply a gradual return to their emotional normalcy. However, some had been traumatized and need professional help (From National Report Hungary, 2022).

The Croatian and Cypriot stakeholders pointed out the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Croatian stakeholders working with students highlight the following negative visible changes: alienation, different energy, different learning, different conversations and social distance. The school curriculum in Croatia was greatly simplified, depriving students of knowledge, the pandemic further endangered vulnerable groups and negatively affected their already low educational opportunities.

The school principal points out that the priority should have been the resocialization of students and asks them how they are because it was obvious that the children had lost basic social skills, their mental health was impaired, and school was the only safe place for some students. According to the latter, "sometimes it's just enough for someone to listen to them, encourage them, empower them." The importance of the relationship, the principal tries to compensate with her support for the lack of professional service, which consists only of pedagogues and librarians. The students themselves emphasize the family atmosphere with great advantage (it is a small school). The big challenge is that the school has no one to refer to students' mental health problems, for example, the principal reports students' suicidal thoughts, but does not receive a response from the competent services, which are overwhelmed with cases. "We don't have a place to send those children to ask for help" (From National Report Croatia, 2022).

A Croatian educator reported that after the pandemic they noticed problems such as an increase in peer violence, a decrease in motivation, concentration problems and emotional difficulties.

Also, the Cypriot stakeholders responded that the pandemic had a negative impact on the educational system. The lack of a pre-existing digital framework and teachers' knowledge or skills resulted in insufficient and unsuccessful provision of online distance education. One Cypriot expert noted that decisions to provide distance learning for disabled students promoted segregation rather than inclusion, as many were excluded from education. Another participant explained that students' emotional well-being was negatively affected due to a lack of socialisation, leading to a significant decline in motivation and interest in schooling.



Italian stakeholders reported on both the positive and negative effects of the pandemic on the Italian education system. The experts' discussion and the examples presented confirm that the pandemic has raised many critical issues in the Italian education system, not only in terms of infrastructure (connections, equipment, etc.) but also in terms of adequate digital preparation of teachers and the ability to engage vulnerable students in distance learning. The pandemic has affected students' motivation to improve their skills and whether and how they actively participate in school life. Research shows low performance in reading, writing and mathematics, as well as low social and relationship skills. The experts concluded that schools now face new challenges to innovate teaching and learning processes to promote inclusion and well-being for all students.

Austrian experts saw some positive changes at the institutional level during the pandemic, but fear that "business as usual" will prevail again after the pandemic and that little or nothing will change in the rigid education system.

The Hungarian experts also believe that distance learning opened the door to online learning methods and see this as a positive consequence. It depends on the individual decisions of the teachers and schools to what extent they return to the good old frontal method in teaching after the pandemic or use methods that have proven successful in distance learning.

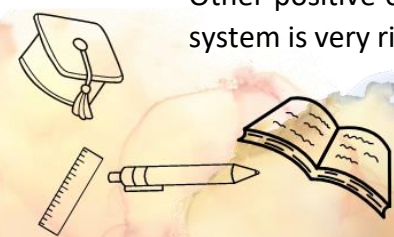
All stakeholders from all partner countries agreed that the (further) development of IT competences and skills is a positive consequence of the pandemic.

The Cypriot participants agreed that this experience has supported the renewal of the system through the digitalisation of educational practices, the training of teachers in the use of digital tools in education and by raising awareness of the importance of student well-being in education.

The Croatian experts talked about the advantage of discovering some new online tools that can continue to be used and that both students and teachers have worked on digital literacy. But they also mention that a large number of people realised that computers cannot replace human teachers and the importance of the role of living schools and education.

The pandemic led to a surge in digitalisation, which made it possible, for example, to connect video interpreters in all languages to parental meetings. Digitalisation made it possible to use new, creative online learning methods (National Report Austria, 2022). The most obvious and long-term positive impact, according to the Hungarian participants, is the tremendous development of IT skills and competences on the part of both teachers and students. Distance learning opened the door for online learning methods. A huge number of online methods, tools, resources are now available to teachers, but quality can vary widely. According to the Hungarian experts, based on their experiences in distance education, both sides (students and teachers) have learned that school is more than just a place of academic learning, and the socio-emotional aspect has been recognised. The Italian experts concluded that the pandemic has given teachers the opportunity to more quickly develop new skills that are useful for the effective integration of digital teaching in schools.

Other positive effects were mentioned by the Austrian participants. The Austrian education system is very rigid and bureaucratic. Bringing about change is almost impossible and if it is, it



is very slow. But the pandemic showed that it is possible to change something in the Austrian school system very quickly. Laws and decrees were simply changed or repealed within a short time, which made it possible for example, to work in smaller groups due to the smaller number of students allowed to be physically present.

The majority learned a lot, such as time management, self-organisation, use of online tools, flexibility, getting and allowing help with for example mental health problems.

According to one expert, the number of pupils in Austria who dropped out of school and were then home-schooled, the so-called externists, increased during the pandemic because of a variety of reasons, such as the compulsory wearing of masks at schools.

## Part 2: RELATION BETWEEN POSITIVE PERFORMANCE AT SCHOOLS/WELLBEING AT SCHOOLS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION APPROACHES

According to the experts, poor academic performance, school refusal and school dropout are a multifactorial problem.

One Croatian participant believes that the entire system is responsible for school dropout. The problems start in pre-school and early primary school because the system does not respond adequately to the educational needs of the pupils. Most of the time, vulnerable children are not the focus. There is a need to raise awareness and make visible unequal starting positions and unfavourable situations for pupils' school success and well-being. One expert believes that Croatia has such a low dropout rate because the criteria for staying in school have been lowered.

Austrian participants are also of the opinion that one factor is the school system itself. Students are constantly under pressure to perform, which leads to stress. The focus is almost exclusively on what the students cannot do and not on what they can do well or their strengths. Meaningfulness and processes are questioned because students do not feel they can change anything or actively participate in improving their situation.

The Hungarian education system is severely underfunded. The lack of financial resources and the extremely low salaries of teachers are cited as the main factors for early school leaving at the institutional level.

Another factor on structural level is segregation in education. The Hungarian educational system is overtly focused on knowledge and learning outcomes.... Segregation is maintained by the entrance examination system, which differentiates among students with good and bad academic performances and is highly selective. Students with a bad performance go to schools where the level of education and the qualifications of teachers are lower, and therefore can't offer the help and inclusion which is very much needed.... The curriculum is over-regulated,





and leaves no space for differentiated education, which takes into consideration the individual, formative needs of the students (From National Report Hungary, 2022).

Cypriot participants also criticised the education system, and the lack of provisions. A direct link was established between the insufficient application of inclusive and emotional education and school dropout in Cyprus. The current education system is based on an inadequate legal framework that does not accept students with different learning abilities and characteristics and allows negative prejudice by teachers towards students with atypical learning styles. According to one of the experts, inclusive education is not currently practiced in Cyprus, as inclusive education implies the practical and educational inclusion of pupils with disabilities, not only their physical integration into school units and the placement of 'difficult' pupils in special units.

On a personal level, the main reason for ESL for the Hungarian experts is that in the family the parents themselves are not role models. The school alone cannot prevent ESL and dropouts without a supportive, cooperative family in the background.

For the Cypriot participants, the main reasons influencing ESL on a personal level are the background and socio-economic conditions of the students, such as the need to work, especially in rural areas and/or for students with a migrant background or children of single parents. Some mentioned the negative image of education given to pupils in their environment, which affects their motivation and interest. Others mentioned the prevailing social and parental pressure in Cyprus to follow certain educational paths to ensure a lucrative career, which does not consider students' abilities and interests and leads to school failure and dropout.

Factors on a personal level mentioned by Austrian experts are psychological problems, which are often reacted to too late, and problems in the parental home and/or choosing the wrong school, for example because parents want their child to visit grammar school.

What all experts agreed on is that safe relationships and a protected space would definitely have a positive effect on academic performance, school refusal and dropout. They all stressed that learning can only work with a good teacher-student relationship. If students do not feel comfortable or welcome at school, they will eventually stop going.

A Croatian educator from the university stated that she meets many students who want to leave school. What helps are workshops where she encourages them to gather thoughts on what they can do and what options they have. She believes in asking students, listening to them, and really valuing what they say. According to the latter, "we need to move away from objectifying the child and look at the child as a subject and an equal actor - that's our responsibility".

A factor that is stressed by the Austrian participants and can have a strong positive effect on school life and the school success of students is a good, stable team of responsible adults with functioning communication between all parties involved, teachers, parents, school management, school psychologists, and social workers. The interviewees felt that communication between teachers and parents is particularly important.



The Italian experts also believe that a very important element in strengthening the education system in the fight against early school leaving is the increased cooperation of schools with the other actors around the schools. The „Educational Territorial Alliance Agreement" is a new instrument created by the Italian Minister of Education for schools to strengthen the cooperation between schools and other actors in the community: social and private associations, youth associations, volunteers, etc. Promoting exchanges between the formal and informal education systems could be a good way to renew the curriculum and to give all students the opportunity to develop their competences in informal settings. There is a need to promote inclusion during studies, to address cross-curricular issues, to identify vulnerable students in general and to collaborate with other institutions and the families (National Report Croatia, 2022).

The level of inclusion in Hungarian schools varies greatly. On the one hand there are some good examples and practices, on the other hand there are schools where there is no inclusion at all. Stakeholders agree that inclusion should have been present in Hungarian public education for decades. Society needs to be reflected in schools as much as possible. Nevertheless, inclusion is not an issue that Hungarian policymakers deal with.

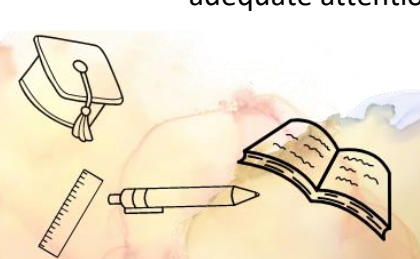
On the Austrian institutional level, it was mentioned that society should be reflected in new ways. In Vienna, for example, about 50% of the people have a migrant background, which is not considered enough in textbooks or in everyday school life.

In Austria there are very different views on inclusion and inclusive education among school leaders and teachers, and more or less time is invested on the issue. The experts agreed, it is very attitude-dependent whether and how inclusive teaching takes place. The topic would be included in the textbooks of almost all subjects. However, whether these chapters are then used and how intensively depends on the teacher. Concrete examples on the topic of inclusion were, for example, the larger print of worksheets for students with visual impairments or that students with reading difficulties get more time for reading tasks and tests. But again, this depends on the school and the teacher.

Applying an inclusive approach and emotional education is not a requirement and is based mainly on the commitment of individual teachers (especially form teachers). The schools are not held to account by the Hungarian educational authority whether they apply inclusive approach and SEL in their teaching practice (National Report Hungary, 2022).

Croatian stakeholders point out that there are already interdisciplinary curricula on "personal and social development" and "learning how to learn", which strongly address the issues of motivation and social-emotional learning but are not systematically implemented and depend on the commitment and will of the individual.

In Cyprus, various emotional education programmes have been introduced in schools, aiming to develop psychological support systems for students and raise awareness of the need to develop basic skills such as communication, self-awareness, and empathy, and to promote an inclusive classroom environment. However, according to one participant, teachers fail to give adequate attention to these issues in their classrooms.



According to the Austrian interviewees, the following concepts would be helpful in reducing early school leaving and to bring inclusion and social-emotional learning more into the classroom: Free work and project work, artistic and sporting projects, performing arts as a separate subject, interdisciplinary work, subjects without assessment, mixed-age groups, and self-determined working.

### Part 3: TEACHERS' COMPETENCE IN THE LEARNING FIELD OF INCLUSIVE AND EMOTIONAL EDUCATION - FORMATIVE NEEDS OF TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS

Teachers need to review their pedagogical practices due to the low competences of the students and their low motivation after the pandemic.... They need to adopt tools to observe the social dynamic and the emotional dimensions of the students to better read the classroom environment and identify the better strategies to use to promote wellbeing and motivation and stimulate positive relation between students. Social and psychological tools of observation could be introduced and used by teachers to aid the identification of the individual needs of the students.... Teachers need to acquire self-reflection competencies on their model of teaching and the way they are in relation to all of their students (From National Report Italy, 2022).

In addition, an Austrian stakeholder stated that burn-out prevention for teachers would be important in the form of self-reflection and self-regulation training or supervision.

Cypriot participants highlighted the need for teachers to differentiate and adapt their teachings, materials, and methods of engagement according to the educational and formative needs, as well as, learning styles of all the students in their classroom. One of the interviewees highlighted the need for teachers to accept guidance from specialists in the fields of educational inclusion and psychological development of children. Teachers must develop a culture of positive communication with their colleagues by sharing best practice methods and by asking for support in times of difficulty.

Croatian teachers, according to experts, lack training in relationship building, conversation culture, problem solving, emotions, desires and needs. These topics should also be introduced as subjects in schools from the first grade onwards. Teachers must first develop their own emotional competencies to be able to help students. Their skills in topics such as peer violence, mediation, mental health, relationship development and trust, awareness and acceptance should be improved. It is important to overcome the mistakes in initial teacher training. It is wrong to assume that all teachers feel comfortable in workshop activities or working on socio-emotional issues. Therefore, it is important to enable teachers to empower themselves and feel comfortable in this area.



One Croatian stakeholder stresses the great need to work with teachers on the issues of socio-emotional and inclusive learning in initial teacher training and in the long term. According to the latter, "If they are not good, they cannot provide a safe and supportive environment for children".

In Austria, stakeholders would find training on early identification of mental health problems or learning support needs, on social-emotional learning and on inclusive teaching helpful. The last two points can only be learned as a student at the University of Teacher Education if you do a very specific Masters degree on the subject. The curriculum for educators should definitely include bounding theory because education only works through bounding. Teachers should also have some basic knowledge about trauma and trauma management in order to be able to deal with affected students.

According to an Austrian participant stable, good relationships and empathy for children and young people are the basic prerequisites for successful learning.

" Children will not be changed by programs, but by interpersonal relationships, because it is relationships that will influence whether a student wants to listen to the teacher, to confide in him, and that is actually the privilege of a great teacher." ... It is necessary to recognize the needs and open the eyes to the needs of the students, not to imply. We need to ask and look for answers and get to know the child, not to think in advance that we know everything. The goal is to involve vulnerable groups in activities (From National Report Croatia, 2022).

In-service training for active teachers in Austria is voluntary. One interviewee would like to see an obligation for all to attend certain trainings.

In all cases, the trainings offered by the Cypriot Pedagogical Institute should be made mandatory for all incoming and in-service educators, with Health and Inclusive Education becoming a mandatory element of their seminars. It is the opinion and suggestion of one of the professors interviewed that teacher training curriculums must include the following modules:

- An introduction to the Universal Design for Learning (UDL), its methodological and practical approach.
- An introduction to inclusive education, methods, and practices
- The significance of emotional intelligence and its value in the classroom.

The question of what the Austrian experts would include into a curriculum for educators was answered relatively uniformly: Relationship theory, interdisciplinary work together with parents, youth protection, psychiatry, social work, special needs teachers and all other stakeholders, basic knowledge about trauma (coping) and stress (coping). In addition, inclusive teaching and social emotional learning should be a fixed part of the curriculum for all education students

In Hungary the majority of teachers graduated at least 20 years ago or more, when the inclusive approach and SEL were not part of their academic training. Therefore, most teachers working in the Hungarian public education sector today are not equipped with the right tools





and methods for inclusive and emotional education. The system of teacher education and training of future teachers is not effective as it cannot reach those who mainly work in public education with new approaches and methods.

Another challenge for teachers mentioned by stakeholders in the different countries was the time factor. Often, too little time is the reason in for example Austria why social emotional learning is not or only very little part of the lessons.

#### Part 4: DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE INCLUSIVE AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR VULNERABLE STUDENTS - EXAMPLES AND GOOD PRACTICES

To feel good and be successful at school, children and young people have certain needs. These include participation, students want to be heard and seen, stable relationships, empathy, the school and the classroom as a safe and secure space and stress reduction.... The strengths and skills of the students should be highlighted with less emphasis being placed on negative achievements.

To increase well-being in schools, it would make sense to integrate socio emotional learning into all curricula and subjects. This would also be thematically possible in almost all subjects. Support that they may not get at home for various reasons should be offered to them at school (From National Report Austria, 2022).

One participant in the Croatian interview points out the need to give children space to show what they are good at and to support and give them feedback in the areas where they are not good. It is important to know all the factors that make students vulnerable and to be aware of their needs and how to meet them. This is not only about free transport and buildings, but also about support for inclusion and emotional learning.

According to the Croatian experts it is necessary to understand what vulnerabilities are, to understand how to support these children and what are the consequences if they are not addressed and benefits if they are.

One stakeholder stated that beyond basic academic needs, all children need to be understood, accepted, respected, appreciated, be given a sense of security and equal educational opportunities, to develop positive relationships with peers and educational staff, and be given adequate psychological and emotional support throughout their formative years (National Report Cyprus, 2022).

According to Croatian stakeholders it is not necessary to design new curricula, but to look at the existing ones and see how to combine subjects, thus apply an interdisciplinary approach to education. interdisciplinarity. The challenge is creating personal learning programmes based on the real needs of each student and guarantee equal opportunities of inclusion and success at school. New pedagogical competences, tools, and practise to design the curricula



in the interdisciplinary way to give attention at the emotional dimension (National Report Italy, 2022).

Inclusive and emotional schooling can be materialised in three ways:

- An increase in the teaching hours devoted to Health Education with an added emphasis on issues of inclusion and emotional education.
- The introduction of a separate and mandatory lesson in the curriculum focusing on issues of acceptance and respect of differences and emotional education.
- The introduction of mini modules within pre-existing lessons focusing on issues of emotional education. An example would be the inclusion of a module in Greek language classes, physical education, or music (From National Report Cyprus, 2022).

Another consideration by the Italian experts was the introduction and application of peer education or mentoring methods in the daily life of the classroom. These approaches are proven to be very effective in developing civic competencies in students and providing support to other students who are in a difficult situation or at risk of exclusion. Teachers need to improve their skills to apply the mentoring programme in the daily life of the classroom and to improve students' wellbeing and motivation to learn. There should be a revision of the curricula in an inclusive way.

A Croatian educator suggests using methods and techniques that influence behaviour, inspire pupils to act and stresses the importance of communication. Themes and techniques that have worked well are teamwork, relationships, clear rules, confidentiality, equality, importance of relationships, good class climate, mediation topics, sitting in a circle, clear communication, empathy, assertiveness, and self-communication.

Methods to support children and young people with problems mentioned by the Austrian stakeholders are counseling, parent talks, workshops, team building exercises, with topics that students are currently dealing with or interested in such as war or conflicts among themselves and official absenteeism notices from school. The latter is important to be able to initiate necessary steps.

The Hungarian model of “Helyőkeresztúr” is focusing on differentiated education, with the individual formative needs of the student in the center. In this model 10% of the lessons are dedicated to individual development, with all students receiving individual tasks that are different from all the others in the classroom. There will be questions that can be answered by only one individual, so that all can contribute to the knowledge of the group and can feel as an important and valued member of the community. Hungarian experts believe that methods and tools that focus on student activity, such as drama and dialogue, should be promoted more.

According to an expert, the Austrian school system does not meet the current demands that life places on it. Starting in autumn, the subject "Digital Basic Education" will be introduced as a compulsory subject, which has been demanded for a long time and was way overdue. Now pupils would need soft skills such as the ability to work in a team in order to have good chances in professional life.





Hungarian Experts see a need in reforming the evaluation system and to adapt it to the needs of the modern school which are less knowledge and information but more competence oriented.



## 4 Conclusions and recommendations

### 4.1 Conclusions

Legislation for inclusive education exists in all partner countries but there are differences in the extent of inclusion and the groups that are considered. There are different levels of inclusion depending on the national context.

While all countries rely on a slightly different definition of *inclusion*, at its core inclusion and inclusive education is understood as the educational system that considers all people as equal, regardless of their abilities or characteristics. The same opportunities and rights have to be guaranteed for all people without distinction of gender, ethnicity, language, or abilities.

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) involves learning and acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to understand one's own feelings and those of others, handle unpleasant emotions and to be able to act accordingly in social situations.

CASEL (2022) defines five basic skills that can and should be built through SEL programmes:

- Self-awareness
- Social awareness
- Self-management
- Responsible decision making
- relationship management

SEL has a positive effect on school performance and school engagement. Empathy and social emotional intelligence improve educational success and thus counteract academic failure and early school leaving. It also serves to promote health and prevent addiction, emotional and/or behavioural disorders, bullying and violence. According to Reicher H. and Marischek (2018) “SEL is the prerequisite for participation and social commitment on the way to becoming a critical and responsible citizen”.

Most of the partner countries (Austria, Cyprus, Hungary, and Italy), used the definition of the European Commission of Early School Leaving (ESL), which refers to *young people between the age of 18 to 24 who have no more than a lower secondary level graduation or less and are currently not in any education or training*.

While the **EU 27 average** was at **9,7%** in 2021, with **the aim** of dropping **below 9% by 2030**, national data varies. In Austria, ESL rate in 2021 was at 8%, in Cyprus at 10,2%, Hungary at 12% and Italy at 12,7% (Eurostat, 2022).

Croatia uses a different definition in national context, stating that „dropping-out is the interruption of the education of a student who enrolled in high school, but who did not successfully complete it and did not obtain a certificate, but dropped out before completing the enrolled high school program” (Rumberger, 2011).





The most affected groups of ESLs are migrants (Austria, Cyprus, Hungary), members of the Roma community in Croatia and Hungary, male students and students from rural areas.

ELS is a multi-faceted problem and needs to be addressed holistically through systemic change. The reasons must be found at the structural level and not at the individual level. Lack of emotional competencies and well-being at school are crucial factors for academic failure and ESL. In many countries, segregation at schools is also a driving force.

To fulfil formative needs is not only giving students competencies and skills in knowledge but it also educating them to the values of active citizenship, to become responsible and possibly balanced and satisfied people.

By developing teachers' competences and skills in inclusive education and socio-emotional learning and providing resources and materials on these topics, school performance and wellbeing at school can be improved. It is important to provide to our children the right tools for their future lives and school is the place where all children and young people are reached.

Teachers must strive to create a system that reflects and celebrates diversity and allows children to reach higher standards. The aim should be achieving excellence for all students, with excellence being the best performance they can give, while respecting and valuing differences.

Teachers can create new paths to learning standards by providing more learning options for students. Not all children learn in the same way. By offering more routes to outcomes, teachers enable more children to reach them. Teachers should observe and monitor the class in order to clarify the formative needs of everyone.

Every child should be given the chance to get better and should feel “able to”, accepted and important to his/her peers and his/her teachers. The most important formative need is to promote positive motivational beliefs and self- esteem. You can't build up anything without that. This is not only linked with the knowledge or the learning process. To fulfil a formative need you have to use tools that identify misconceptions, struggles, learning gaps and find a way to close all these gaps through approaches that can support specific students' needs. The opportunity to revise the curriculum and take a new approach, new types of learning processes, focusing on the diversity of students' learning styles, multiple intelligences and on the motivation and recognition of non-formal competencies.

## 4.2 Recommendations

The research concluded that most teachers are not sufficiently equipped with methods and strategies on the topics of inclusive education, socio-emotional learning, and special educational needs. There is a lack of teaching staff competencies in all partner countries. This is prevalent from teacher trainings at universities, where such topics are only sporadically covered if at all, with future teachers not receiving adequate preparation. In addition, in-service training of practising teachers' courses on inclusive education and SEL are optional. However, in order to navigate the increasingly complex and diverse everyday school life and



ensure student well-being and positive academic performance, teachers need strategies and practices to help them do so. Many organizations and institutions in the different partner countries provide programs and trainings on SEL.

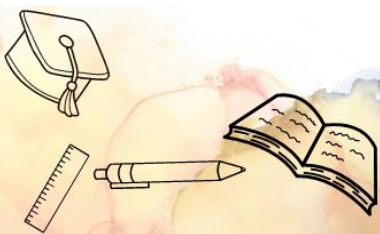
But a lack of knowledge and skills in these areas can lead to negative attitudes towards them. However, as the use of inclusive education, SEL and related innovative methods and practices depends very much on the attitude and the enthusiasm of the individual teacher and/or the school management, training and development of teachers is absolutely necessary. They have to be equipped with socio-emotional skills. Teachers are role models for their students. They should be aware that their actions and the views they convey are adopted and imitated by students.

Attitudes towards these topics would improve for many through training and further education, where good practice examples are also shown and discussed, and this would also increase the motivation of many teachers to include SEL and inclusive education in their lessons. Many see inclusive education and SEL as an additional effort that takes time. The benefits of implementing these topics in everyday school practice and the relief experienced in daily school life are often not seen. This too would improve through regular trainings (one educational experience is not enough) for in-service teachers and compulsory courses for prospective teachers at universities.

The positive effects on early school leaving and school performance can also be better communicated to educators through this. For a better implementation of inclusive education and innovative methods and strategies in schools, teachers need to be equipped with knowledge and skills and they need external support because 'what is not clear to them cannot be qualitatively presented to the students' (National Report Croatia, 2022).

#### Recommendations for Teacher Training:

- Training in SEL
- Awareness training of their own Social-Emotional Competences, teachers need to learn and strengthen their own soft skills/life skills
- Learning to deal with Special Needs Students
- Resilience Training for teachers
- Relationship Building
- Crisis and violence Management
- Training in Scaffolding Techniques



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## 6 Annexes

Annex 1: ROADMAP BE-IN: Best Innovative Practices for an Inclusive and Emotional Education to face early school leaving in Europe 2022-2024



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**BE-IN**

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